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ABSTRACT

Perhaps responding to a new awareness of the problems of American Indians, South Dakota Governor George Mickelson issued an executive proclamation declaring 1990 the "Year of Reconciliation." Dakota Wesleyan University responded to this proclamation by participating with the Mitchell Area Vocational-Technical in establishing a "Sister Community" relationship with Lower Brule, a community about 2 hours from Mitchell. Teacher and student exchanges have already occurred at the secondary level, and programs have been implemented at Dakota Wesleyan. Some observations of the situation of American Indian students both on campus at Dakota Wesleyan and at the off campus site in Wagner include: (1) American Indian enrollment is now 9% of the student body; (2) enrollments have been impacted by college recruitment practices, increased tuition, decreased funding by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the emergence of reservation colleges; (3) American Indian students are now interested in careers other than American Indian Studies; (4) while from 1885-1985 Dakota Wesleyan graduated only 26 Native American students, from 1985 to the present the college has graduated 51 students; and (5) American Indian students (with notable exceptions) still tend to be apprehensive of oral assignments in the communication classroom. American Indian students enhance the experience of all students in communication classes. As a small, private, liberal arts college, Dakota Wesleyan has the potential to serve the needs of these minority students in the future. Recognizing cultural differences and being sensitive to the needs of American Indian students will result in more effective teaching and learning at the university and more specifically in communication classes. (PRA)

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THE AMERICAN INDIAN EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNICATION CLASSROOMS

MIKE TURCHEN, DAKOTA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

CENTRAL STATES COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

APRIL 12, 1991, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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BACKGROUND

The U.S. News & World Report (December 31, 1990, p. 71) has a brief report entitled, "Native American Chic." This article suggests that Kevin Costner's academy award winning film "Dances with Wolves," much of which was filmed two hours from Dakota Wesleyan University, would be likely "to spur a new awareness of Native Americans." Furthermore, hope is expressed that the historical problems of unemployment and poor health care might be addressed. While education is not mentioned it is certainly a worthy and equally important concern.

Perhaps in response to a new awareness South Dakota Governor George Mickelson issued an executive proclamation declaring 1990 the "Year of Reconciliation." Dakota Wesleyan University responded to this proclamation by participating with the Mitchell Area Vocational-Technical in establishing a "Sister Community" relationship with Lower Brule. This community is about two hours from Mitchell, South Dakota, and exchange programs have begun. These include a Lower Brule float in the Corn Palace Stampede, Mitchell representatives attending the Lower Brule Annual Fair and Pow-Wow and the Friends of the Middle Border Museum offering free admission to any resident of Lower Brule.

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Teacher and student exchanges have occurred at the secondary level.

At Dakota Wesleyan University the annual Pow Wow is dedicated to Reconciliation. The university library is offering a series of films on American Indian Culture and students taking American Indian Studies 335 Biculutralism and American Indian Education are tutoring Indian children in the local school district. This will become a course requirement.

At the fall Faculty Meeting, faculty were asked if they would be willing to become involved in reconciliation efforts by offering workshops or presentations. The commitment required donating time and effort and travelling to the reservations. Fourteen faculty members indicated a willingness to participate.

The American Indian Student at Dakota Wesleyan University

In 1983 I delivered a paper at the Central States Communication Association Convention entitled "The Native American Experience at Dakota Wesleyan University." In the remainder of this paper I would like to suggest changes and similarities which exist for American Indian students at the college and specifically my personal observations of these students in Communication classes.

1. This semester there are 20 full time American Indian students on campus and 38 at our off-campus site in Wagner, South Dakota. This is 6% of our on campus students and 9% of the total student body. The Wagner site was established in cooperation with the Yankton Sioux Tribe.

2. Enrollments have been impacted by college recruitment practices, increased tuition costs and decreased funding by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the emergence of reservation colleges.

3. American Indian students are now interested in careers other than American Indian Studies. Similar to white students Human Services, Nursing, Business, and Education are among the most popular majors. Dakota Wesleyan has dropped the American Indian Studies major to a minor because of low enrollments and the fact that the reservation colleges now offer this major.

4. From 1885-1985 Dakota Wesleyan graduated 26 Native American students. From 1985 to the present the college has graduated 51 students. They have been successful in several areas. Journalism, Law, Art, Clinical Psychology, Communication Disorders, and Teaching.

5. In the Communication classroom as was the case in the report a decade ago, American Indian students tend to be apprehensive and in some cases threatened by oral assignments. There are notable exceptions to this generalization.

American Indian students enhance the experience of all students in communication classes. As a small, private, liberal arts college Dakota Wesleyan has the potential to serve the needs of these minority students in the future. Recognizing cultural differences and being sensitive to the needs of American Indian students will result in a more effective teaching and learning at the University and more specifically in communication classes.